

Dear Parents

St Valentine 's Day is over for another year and I am quite relieved. I know some people enjoy the day (especially if they sell chocolates or flowers) but I suspect many people quite envy the Saudis the banning order issued by those in authority there. Of course if someone made you feel very special today you are bound to disagree with me, and I am very happy for you, but spare a thought for those people for whom the day simply emphasised their loneliness or their feelings of inadequacy in this find-and-keep-a-mate ritual.

My feelings about the day are, no doubt, clouded by the fact that I was a hopelessly inadequate teenager in this game. My school was 100 km from any similar girl's school but around Valentines Day the jocks would start to get their extra mail. "Peter, can I use your pigeonhole for the next week or so as mine is overflowing and I see yours is pretty empty –well, completely empty!". Terribly humiliating! You try and join in the "fun" of it all but you know you are just looking through the window on the real men at play. They seem to interact with girls effortlessly – something you can only (and do) dream of. Now 30 years later I watch it all being played out with a new group of boys and there I am, the one sitting near the back hoping that by some complete miracle (or clerical error) one of those roses is for me. He has no chance – unless his understanding sister organised one to come from St Cyprians (and everyone would suspect something).

This whole **boy-girl thing** is, of course, a deadly serious game in the end because who we choose to spend our lives with is the biggest decision most of us make. However, I do not think one has to be overly concerned about whether or not one's son is competent and confident in his interactions with girls at this stage. Boys develop in this regard at very different rates due to a number of factors which include such things as genetics, siblings, character of parents and friendship circles. In addition it is hard to know how much difference it makes in the end to a successful match romantically. Certainly my experience is that the "jocks" of old did not make any more of a success in romance in the end than the rest of us – though maybe they managed more "conquests" on the way. In the end, wherever our sons fit on the scale with regard to confidence with the opposite sex I think it is always important to help them to see what the endgame ought to be – a happy and successful life-long union with someone they love (We may not have managed this ourselves for any number of reasons but we can still want it for our sons.). Most boys intrinsically know this I think but, because they live very much in the present, are far more likely to be driven by the excitement of the chase and new experiences, the elation of having their ego inflated and the increasing desire for sex and intimacy. They may not seem to listen to the advice we give them but we should still give it because most other inputs they receive do not have their best interests at heart. As parents we do - even though now and then we will make mistakes.

Super 14 starts today.... What a relief! It is something for us men to talk about which does not matter much at all really. Perfect!

Yours sincerely

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